Like it was a blessing sent from God

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by orphan_account

Summary

Alex has a cold. Nigel takes care of him and is taking it very well and extremely normally.

In retrospect, Nigel should have seen this coming, eventually. There was more to life than disembowelling an animal with hydrofluoric acid and taking antipsychotics, such as illnesses. Like schistosomiasis and a hookworm infection, and, judging by the way Alex writhed under plus-slash-minus three layers of blankets, *colds*.

The lesser cousin of the flu (not that they were genetically related, but instead joined by their connection of being *maladies*, a bit like how Nigel and Alex themselves were), Nigel had zero concerns regarding Alex's affliction, if you disregarded the fact upon discovering Alex was sick, he had promptly left the room and returned an hour later wearing full personal protective equipment equivalent to that which was required in a stage 4 biosafety facility, and two buckets of God-knows-what. There was nothing to worry about, aside from the fact that there was everything to worry about.

"Is it *really* necessary for you to wear that?" Alex's voice was muffled under the layers of the blankets, head not even laying on the pillows but flat on the bead in self-misery, lifting the blankets from his arms to stare up at Nigel, standing *very* far away from him.

"Yes, it hasn't been determined it's only a cold. It could be tuberculosis, for example. The plague, even." There was to be zero self-introspection into his aversion towards sickness, out of some abdomen-twisting fear that it would be something more than just a phobia of germs, but rather some deep-rooted belief that all sickness must be eliminated and that Nigel *himself* was sick and it permeated through his thoughts like it was a blessing sent from God, only that instead of a blessing it was schizotypy. He was to be put down like an unwanted dog at the shelter rather than a companion being granted mercy at the vet, therefore anything even close to exiting the realm of normal pathology must be avoided at all costs.

A groan was emitted from beneath the sheets. "I do not have fucking *tuberculosis*. Or the plague."

"Fish can have tuberculosis," Nigel pointed out. "Mycobacteria are extremely virulent and pathogenic and cause of millions of deaths worldwide each year, despite common belief tuberculosis was mainly a thing of the past and was eradicated alongside smallpox, or mostly, similar to the case of polio. Even the Templars would have been familiar with it, as it predates them by the thousands."

Nigel paused, his brow furrowing only slightly, before defaulting back

to a less-animated expression, as though he had been suddenly reminded that he was acting awfully *human*. "Not important. I can't swab you if you're behind all–" Nigel gestured to the amalgamation of tissues that lay scattered on the floor, and then to an *extremely empty bin,* "–of that."

"You want to fucking swab me? What are you going to do, put it on your weird-ass plates and make it grow? Are you even – forget even officially – *remotely* qualified to do that?"

Nigel smiled, which was evidenced by the wrinkles near his eyes and less his mouth due to being covered by two masks, "Of course, I am," he lied.

As much as Nigel encouraged him for his stunning personality (read: arrogance), Alex was, unfortunately, afflicted with the entirely human pressure to be as stupid as possible, as often as possible. There were, of course, methods of becoming sick that were out of Nigel's control – or, mostly, aside from Nigel changing their status from *alive* to *dead*, for the dead can't get sick with illness (or emotion) – however Alex had employed the extremely intelligent idea of funnelling a concerning amount of sugar down his esophagus, decreasing his immune system temporarily, and then being involved in some childish dare involving doorknobs and tongues, of which Nigel had zero intention of thinking about any further. It didn't matter, they all had their vices. Alex had an underdeveloped frontal lobe. Nigel had homicidal ideation. Something about flaws or whatever.

"Please stop talking to me," Alex looked miserable, which was surely due to the unknown bacteria colonizing his windpipe and not at all related to Nigel's presence and-or lecture on tuberculosis. Nigel felt himself disconnected from his body, even if only faintly. Either stuck in his head as a prelude to whatever would come out of his mouth next, or just plain dissociation from being in the same room as someone who's sick.

"I could see you dying of the plague," Nigel decided.

"Genuinely, honest to whatever God it is you pray to, what the fuck is that supposed to mean."

"You, withered on the ground, your skin swallowed with welts and pus. Dying. Of the plague." Normal thoughts, really. What seventeen-year-old hadn't imagined themselves throughout points in time and imagined the way they'd get beheaded or die of dysentery or

something?

Nigel's thrilling daydream of Alex being infected with the bubonic plague came to a halt as Alex descended into a coughing fit, seemingly intent on throwing up his lungs, had they been able to fit through his esophagus, instead opting for drowning in his own mucus. A fitting way to die for such an egotistical creature – his own downfall was himself. However, as much as death was a holy thing, Nigel wasn't quite done with him.

And of course, it was only a relationship where they merely used one another for their own machinations, rather than anything along the lines of truly caring for one another, which were emotions that surely neither held for the other. Angels don't feel love. And when they *do*, they create amalgamations that result in the downfall of civilizations and are smitten in a holy fury consequently. *I love you, let's create something unholy, Hell on Earth.* Angels don't love.

But there were plans. Plans that Nigel had drawn up ever since he was a kid. Plans that he would detail in his head as an escape from the shouting match of his parents. They would grow increasingly detailed alongside the increasing frequency of a shotgun being pulled upon a human. There was nothing to be afraid of, for he would solve the screaming that echoed within his head long after the physical act ended, for he would bring salvation to himself, to his parents, and to the world. He would fix the blemished soil and foundations society was built. He was an apostle and his preachings needed no listening, no audience nor encore, he only needed *time*.

However, he was a holy messenger, and his work rewarded him with another like him. Alex had very abruptly weaselled his way into Nigel's mind, becoming an overwhelming presence that enveloped Nigel as though he were the planets and Alex the sun, a solar system of two. It was as though Alex was a gift, specifically, from God as a reward for his perseverance. They were joined in the mind and soon morbidity would join them in the flesh. If Nigel were to bleed, he was certain that it would be Alex's blood that would flow forth from him. They had been enkindled with the holy fire of the Seraphim, Angels closest to the hand of God, the physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit, burning away the humanity that plagued them and the emotions and ability to err it entailed.

Nigel rarely revealed his plans to his parents, after confiding in them at a young age and consequently being banished to reveal or talk about such *delusions*. He had been forced to hide beneath the

floorboards, the foundations of the house being the only refuge. But that was no matter, it was fitting – the foundations of the house would form the birthplace of the foundations of the new world. He had been briefly spurned, told that what he was doing was deeply wrong and incorrect, but Alex appeared. Alex appeared and he was a sign not to falter, a sign that he was walking the correct path and doing the *correct* thing.

And he discovered, after everything, that he *needed* Alex. He craved to fuse together their bones and carve out his own heart and place it in a preserve jar for Alex to carry with forever, for even if Nigel died, Alex would have a part of him that would never leave, his arteries swelling not with blood but a promise. *Need* submerged him in his own head and Nigel wanted nothing more than to lobotomize himself for it. Alex could cure Nigel. So could a hemispherectomy.

It was this dependence, this attachment, that made it so that Nigel was unable to leave, the option itself having been taken away from him. Their bond was fervid, their skin burning away upon touch, yet such toxicity was disregarded for the skin was only a barrier to their union. He couldn't afford to lose Alex, for Nigel lacked ego of the self and would lose himself in the loss of Alex.

"Come on," Nigel reached out to the body beneath the covers, "When did you last shower? It will help."

Alex was barely audible. "Don't wanna get up," it came out as a whine. It was almost as though the cold had reduced Alex to a kid, or it would have, assuming Alex wasn't already the equivalent of a seven-year-old half the time.

"It will help, c*ome on.*"

Alex groaned – exaggerating, surely, for the drama of it – as he rose from the bed. Nigel moved out before him, heading towards the showers that only produced water half the time and some disturbed liquid that had probably run through piles of human hair to reach the room the other half. The water emitted never remained at a constant pressure, alternating between the weakest stream to inducing neurological damage at uneven intervals, however, it was the only option there was.

The pipes groaned as though they were haunted – they probably were – and Nigel turned around, knowing Alex would be arriving in T minus three seconds. He was acutely aware of Alex's presence, feeling

as though he could read Alex's mind with ease, which was *normal,* because they *shared one,* even if Alex protested that they didn't. He would come around, eventually, like a child to vegetables, assuming that in this case the child was a seventeen-year-old and the vegetables were religious callings with a side of hearing-voices-in-your-head.

"Is it water or sewage today?" Alex peered at Nigel behind the corner.

Nigel noticed the way Alex swayed on his feet, clutching at the walls for support. Maybe they were both sick in the head. "Water. But I could distil anything that comes out of this, anyways."

"How *kind* of you."

"It should be warm," Nigel ignored him. It wasn't hard.

"Wonderful. Now get out."

"Get out?"

Alex looked at him with the same expression he held when Nigel started detailing his beliefs. "*Yes?* What, you think I'm letting you stay?*"*

"I do, yes."

"Absolutely not. You've dragged me out of bed, I'm here now, so leave."

"Spin."

"*What?*"

"Spin," Nigel stated. His reasoning was as simple as basic mathematics, he only needed to show it to Alex. He overcomplicated and overthought things an awful lot. "You need me. Let go of that wall and do a spin. I'll leave you if you can."

"You're insane."

"Yes, we've established this. Spin."

Alex, ever propelled by the combination of needing to do stupid things, and also proving people wrong, let go of the wall. He held Nigel's gaze with a familiar intensity, one so often held whenever Nigel would achieve a higher mark in an assignment than Alex by a singular point, an expression he wore when he barreled recklessly

down a moving train, one that was the embodiment of his stubborn passion. His forehead was creased with focus, his shoulders tightening in such a minuscule way that would be unnoticeable to anyone except for Nigel, who had spent hours analysing Alex as though he were a specimen in a lab. Nigel moved towards Alex as Alex moved to put one leg before the other as he motioned to begin the action demanded of him,

And fell.

Nigel caught Alex as he collapsed, the act of a three-sixty-degree turn evidently too overwhelming in such a state. Nigel kept a slight distance to avoid any retaliation from Alex as soon as he returned to the world of the conscious and became aware of his position in Nigel's arms. His weight was heavy over Nigel, although it was not unlike that of a blanket. It could have been from exhaustion or sickness or the weight of everything, Nigel was unsure. He supported him from under his armpits, his back against Nigel's stomach, Alex's body shifting slightly with the movement of Nigel's chest. It would have been hilarious, a source of imminent bullying in the future if it wasn't instead sickeningly vulnerable to hold the body of his closest partner in his arms. The water continued to run, pooling across the tiles and reaching out to them.

"You're sick," Nigel stated as Alex stared back up at him. His clothes were beginning to sog, dampening and clutching to the skin it surrounded hotly.

"I don't need your help."

"Yes," Nigel lifted him back onto his feet, Alex's arm over Nigel's shoulder. "You do. Can you take off your clothes by yourself or do you need me to do it for you?"

"*Jesus*- I can do it myself."

Nigel turned away from Alex, fiddling with his own clothes. The steam from the shower fogged the mirrors of the room, the tiles lightly flooded reflecting the flickering, sickened yellow light from the fixture above. Alex's laboured breathing was barely audible above the running water, a moderate salvation, seemingly alleviated at least somewhat by the condensation that filled the room.

Alex leered at Nigel, his posture half-way between hunched and concealing out of a human fit of *embarrassment*, and the other half seemingly taking a shotgun to the bashful half and standing as close to

confident as possible. “Are you not embarrassed? Do you seriously have no shame?”

“For?”

“Are you going to make me spell this out? *Now? Really?*”

“The body is nothing but a vessel for our mission,” Nigel shrugged, “Its physical manifestation means nothing, ultimately. Only our bones will postdate us before they are returned to the soil in the end, alongside everything else.”

“If you start talking about this now, I might actually just kill –” Alex sneezed, “You.”

Nigel hummed in response. “How would you do it? Would I receive a dignified death, would you hold me afterwards and wallow in your *human* emotions?” Nigel pulled Alex by the hand easily, ignoring the protest that spilled from his lips. The water was heavy above them, falling over their figures. “Or would it be violent? Would there be anything left of me after you’re done? What tools would you employ?”

The stream was nothing more than lukewarm in warmth, providing only the barest semblance of comfort. The pipes creaked with the force of the water, the pipes dyed bronze with age and rust. Grit lined the tiles, the water loosening the friction beneath them. Nigel watched as Alex tilted his head backwards beneath the water, his muscles loosening due to the pressure falling over his body. Alex’s breathing grew even, his inhalation growing less heavy.

Alex held onto Nigel’s arm for support, leaning against him slightly, not quite committing fully to the touch. The fog provided an opaque cover, providing some, albeit minuscule, privacy. The water pooled where Nigel’s arm met Alex’s hand before falling to the tiles below. It was a fight between Alex’s ego, and the disorientation of his ear canal threatening to detach the floor from its hinges, a war of which the latter was winning.

“Have you ever tried being normal?” Alex muttered, “Or is speaking in riddles and delusions something you’re physically incapable of resisting?”

Nigel tilted his head. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Do you think your topics are regular? Do you have any normal people hobbies or is it just dead things and religion?”

“Cartomancy.”

“That’s not normal.”

“It’s decently popular.”

“*Yes,* but do most people think everything was prewritten and predicted inside the cards or is it just for *fun*?”

“People do the former the time.” Nigel paused. “I play chess?”

Alex blinked repeatedly as he stared at Nigel past the running water. “*Chess?*”

“I was nearly the champion, back at Leeds.”

“Of course, you’d play fucking chess. World-class-creepy guy also plays mind games plays *the* mind-game.”

“Do you really think I’m so strange?” Nigel enquired. Alex’s constant dismay towards Nigel confused him – their fates were entwined; they had been so very clearly connected the moment they encountered one another. Alex understood history so easily, a prodigy second only to Nigel. How could he not *see* what was so clearly written in the cards? Their fate to follow had been written out clearly since the thirteenth century, of which it was carefully detailed and conserved in a game waiting for them to come into this world, their union having been foretold in the biblical texts – what was there not to understand?

Maybe Alex just needed his eyes checked, Nigel had deducted one night whilst surgically dissecting a stuffed animal he used to seek comfort from as a child, the threads long stained with some fluid Nigel had forgotten. It was a precious thing, which is why it had to be taken apart and studied. He would do the same to Alex, eventually. Even if not physically (or not *yet* physically – there were no promises. His ribcage looked awfully comfortable).

To destroy and to dissect was the most vulnerable form of love Nigel could offer; not one to give through physical means but rather tending towards a less tangible modus operandi; promises left unsaid that were felt through every muscle spindle, pages filled with diagrams of Alex that were carefully concealed from his prying eyes, not to remain hidden forever but until the time is correct. Nigel opted towards tracing angles and looking at the way joints connected, a combination of small molecules and how they created something far bigger. The way muscles supported the skeleton which supported the nerves.

The first thing Nigel built as a child was a mechanical train set, using rudimentary tools that would easily breach the skin barrier had they been mishandled to create cogs that would bring movement to a machine. The paint that had once coated the train was long polluted and dull, most likely resting in the soil beneath the house, having been concealed from the kiss of the sun for the larger end of a decade. Cogs and oil, molecules and chemistry, Alex and Nigel, they were all just devices for something larger.

"*Strange* isn't a strong enough word to describe you. Abnormal," Alex rubbed his nose, "Or freak, maybe."

Alex's grip tightened around Nigel as he moved enough to throw his centre of balance out the proverbial window. Nigel moved behind Alex with ease, hovering at Alex's elbows once reorientated. Alex neither retreated from Nigel nor relaxed into the touch, instead opting to remain stiff, Nigel noting how the muscles of his back tensed. There was neither bark nor bite from Alex, as though touch were some kind of salvation he craved yet denied himself as worthy of. It was where they differed, where Alex craved the kind of touch in a way that only someone without a mother figure could, whereas Nigel discarded it entirely save for being a means to achieving a result. There was no meaning in something so ordinary, so *normal*.

(Whether Nigel was in a constant state of dissociation from his body and had been in a fugue state for the past ten years was wholly irrelevant).

Nigel leaned closer to Alex's ear. The water stained their skin red. "But you follow me anyway."

"Yeah, well, we're both clearly sick in the head," Alex coughed out a laugh, before melting into a groan, Nigel noticing how his forehead creased, afflicted by some form of headache or sinus pain.

"Hold still," Nigel moved to grab a lathered washcloth, offering it out to Alex. Alex looked between Nigel and the cloth, and then to his hands that were very much locked onto Nigel's body. Nigel could see the action potentials firing behind Alex's eyes as he contemplated two very awful outcomes. One; attempting to wash himself but falling victim to gravity, which is very much trying to convince him that it is enacting its force *sideways*, or two; asking Nigel for help.

"It would be no different from cleaning any of my specimens," Nigel offered, his own voice surprising him, slightly uneased.

"*For the love of-* Don't fucking compare me to your stuffed animals," Alex groaned before turning his face away from Nigel after a pause, "just be quick with it."

"A clinical analysis," Nigel soothed (in a failed attempt) as he brought the cloth up to Alex's face.

Alex closed his eyes at the contact, his forehead only slightly easing at the warm towel. "Unhelpful. Please shut up."

Nigel complied – for once – with his signature silence, which in retrospect almost definitely put Alex on edge for the entire *procedure*, but Alex was ultimately a skittish little fool of an animal and there were only so many ways to capture a feral cat without ending up in hospital with an IV due to cat-scratch disease. Or rabies.

The washcloth was firm against Alex's back as Nigel washed him, working methodically and predictably as though it were a scientific method, a procedure that had been studied intently and enacted with careful precision. Nigel's touch was almost a ghost upon Alex's skin as it foretold where he would move to next, a light touch on his shoulder blade or arm an indicator of where Nigel's attention would move to next. Nigel focused on the muscle groups as he worked, attempting to ease the tension that lined Alex's body, etched deeply enough that Nigel was certain it was from more than just the illness. Nigel noted in the back of his mind how Alex reacted, subtly, taking details of actions unknown to him. Alex was so curiously *human*.

Nigel tapped on Alex as he offered the cloth to him to finish for himself, offering his arm for support as he decided he had had enough of invading Alex's personal space for the first time that night, and providing him privacy. Despite the headache, Nigel noted that Alex's breathing had functionally returned to normal, enough to last for a few hours at the minimum. Enough to sleep on. A small enough salvation.

The *THUD* of the towel falling heavily to the ground was a clue enough that Alex had deemed himself clean. Nigel observed as the water pulsed with force, moving outwards in ripples before settling back to swirling around the drain once more, the soap bubbles popping slowly. How a disturbance to an environment would ultimately be neutralized and return to a natural state – it intrigued him. Perhaps even entropy could be conquered, in time. Nigel observed as Alex buried his face directly beneath the stream of water, staying for a moment, before speaking.

“Are you done?” Nigel asked, before receiving only a nod in response. Nigel moved to turn the water off, the tap handles requiring a mild amount of force applied before relenting. He stepped out before Alex, reaching out to throw a towel over Alex’s head with little care, soon after wrapping himself in another.

“Thanks,” Alex muttered before shaking his hair out *very much like a dog*, then proceeded to envelop himself in the towel as though he had regained his shame alongside his senses. Nigel moved towards Alex to support him as he stood, the boy remaining uneasy on his footing.

Once they had retreated to Alex’s quarters (with Alex half on his feet and half in Nigel’s arms), Nigel haphazardly stole a portion of Alex’s clothes to wear – not without an unending stream of protest which was promptly tuned *out* – before moving around the room easily to dispose of the tissues in a safe and biological-loving way, disallowing Alex to wallow further in his *plague pit*. Alex had collapsed unceremoniously onto the bed after getting changed, barely even crawling under the covers, opting to lie pathetically in a ball instead.

Having decided the biohazard was contained to the best of his ability (which was, admittedly, not *much*), Nigel sat on the edge of the bed, hovering over Alex. He moved to place the back of his hand on Alex’s forehead. He knew, of course, that his core body temperature would be elevated as a result of the shower, however, he felt compelled to perform such an action regardless.

Alex made an unintelligible noise at the contact, causing Nigel to crack out in the slightest of smiles, one that was one-sided and crooked, but a smile, nonetheless.

“I’ll need you to say that once again, Jack,” Nigel said.

“Don’t call me that,” A predictable response.

“It’s who you are.”

Alex moved to raise his hand at Nigel as though he were going to throw a punch, only to seemingly run out of energy for the action halfway through and instead let his arm flop amusedly against Alex’s face rather than make any physical contact with Nigel. Nigel looked at the blankets bundled beneath Alex’s body and wondered if he had enough strength to roll him over to his side. Or off the bed. Whichever was easiest to gain access to the covers.

Unaware of where such compulsions were originating from, Nigel

found himself resuming the mantle of tool to Alex, even if in this case the tool was less an implement for killing and instead one for something much *softer*, the position of being serving to another one Nigel had rehearsed an uncountable amount of times. It was some form of *need*, a sickly reminder of his own humanity, pulling him back to his vessel and reminding him of reality, how the wood of the bed felt under his fingertips and the way Alex's skin was hot at his skin, how *real* everything was. He was needed, *here*, with Alex, despite his own qualms with vulnerability. It was a calling, and Nigel dared not reject it regardless of his own insecurities.

Nigel tapped at Alex as he made the motion for him to move over, tugging at the blankets beneath him, threatening to roll him off if needed. Successfully freeing the covers after a fight with a halfway-to-unconscious Alex, Nigel returned them to Alex's body, cocooning him once more in the way Alex had been when Nigel first discovered his plight. If he died of heatstroke during the night due to being unable to release himself from the blankets that wrapped him tightly, well.

A noise brought Nigel out of his head, a mumble from Alex under the covers barely whispered, a word that sounded an awful lot like *stay*. He was unsure if it was even spoken aloud, or if he had simply imagined it, the connection they shared breaching the physical realm. It was, if their union was to be believed, the most horrifying thing Alex had asked, admitting to such emotions a uniquely sickening task.

So, Nigel didn't ask for clarification.

The blankets rustled and shifted as Nigel moved closer to Alex, unsure of which position to take before Alex grabbed at Nigel's arm and pulled him closer. Nigel found himself laying aside Alex, held fixed into position in what was most likely a semi-delirious action. Nigel did, monetarily, find himself cringing halfway into his skin at being in such close contact, before acknowledging that he had *already* spent the past hour near Alex, and whether he was going to catch the same cold was all but confirmed, so he had might as well accept it or kill himself now, no in-betweens.

Alex, in contrast to his earlier behaviour, seemed more inclined to let himself reach out to Nigel's touch, allowing himself to display *weakness*. Nigel wondered if it was exhaustion or if he had finally given in to desire, letting down his walls and façade of self-security. It was always like that, however, a dance between the two of them. Alex acting out of reach before giving in to Nigel at the end of the day, allowing himself to be vulnerable, letting it slip through the cracks.

Nigel concluded that Alex had a consuming need for the kind of contact Nigel offered, a closeness he had never experienced, not in his family or relationships. An answer to Nigel's want to be *needed*, Alex was ultimately someone who *needs* and *takes* without care. It was horribly and perfectly co-dependent.

The shuffling of blankets indicated Alex's movement, resting his head on Nigel's shoulder, an act which struck Nigel as clinging. Nigel inquired, quietly, about the state of Alex's head, to which he reassured him *it's fine, just be quiet*, before falling silent once more. Alex's hand hovered over Nigel's arm, Nigel realizing it was a weak manifestation of Alex's desire for control, some inhibited form of possessiveness that Alex disallowed himself to show. Nigel was, of course, aware of such ego – he had spent many hours observing the way Alex carried himself, and allowed Alex to gain whatever control he desired, a blanket over his own insecurities, masking them.

Nigel allowed himself to feel human, if only briefly, as he listened to Alex's breathing slow as he fell into sleep. Nigel could tell – because he could *always* tell when it came to Alex – how his sleep would be fitful despite his current status of peace. It was no matter, as Nigel promised that he would keep watch throughout the night, for it would be unbecoming of *Jack* to be afflicted by delirium-induced nightmares. He would promise Alex at least a few hours of undisturbed rest, knowing that their mission would continue once more in the morning and that they were *together* once again.

And when Nigel would wake up, he would wake up with Alex by his side, his arms wrapped around Nigel's, and a sinus headache.

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